

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
LEHIGH VALLEY RAILROAD AT OAKWOOD, N.Y., ON
OCTOBER 31, 1925.

January 21, 1926.

To the Commission:

On October 31, 1925, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Lehigh Valley Railroad at Oakwood, N.Y., resulting in the death of one employee, and the injury of three passengers and one employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Auburn and Ithaca Branch of the Auburn Division, which extends between Auburn and Ithaca, N.Y., a distance of 42.2 miles, and is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and a manual block-signal system. The accident occurred at the loading-track switch, located about 150 feet east of the station at Oakwood, approaching this point from the east there is a 2° curve to the right 1,202 feet in length followed by tangent track to the point of accident, 1,235 feet distant, and for a considerable distance beyond. The grade in the immediate vicinity is slightly ascending for westbound trains.

The switch involved is a facing-point switch for westbound trains and leads off to the south or left to the loading track through a No. 6 turnout; the loading track has a maximum curvature of 19°. The switchstand, of the Ramapo type, is located on the south side of the track and stands 7 feet 10 inches above the head-block tie, at the top of the switch stand a kerosene lamp is secured which at night displays a red light when the switch is open and a green light when the switch is closed.

A passing track parallels the main track on the north, the east passing-track switch being located approximately 200 feet east of the loading-track switch.

It was dark and the weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 6.27 p.m.

Description

Westbound passenger train No. 303 consisted of one combination baggage and passenger car and one coach, hauled by engine 2642, and was in charge of Conductor Bates and Engineman Smith. It left Union Springs, the last regular stop, 5.4 miles east of Oakwood, at 6.11 p.m., four minutes late, made a flag stop 2.1 miles east of Oakwood to pick up passengers, and was derailed at Oakwood while traveling at a speed said to have been between 20 and 25 miles an hour.

Engine 2642 entered the open loading-track switch and turned over on its right side, but was only slightly damaged; the front truck of the tender was the only other portion of the equipment to be derailed. There were five cars on the loading track, the first car of which was damaged, while two of the other cars ran off the end of the loading track. The employee killed was the fireman.

Summary of evidence.

The loading track switch was last used by the crew of westbound local freight train extra 748, which arrived at Oakwood at about 4.35 p.m. on the day of the accident. After completing the package work at the station platform the train moved ahead to the clearance point of the passing track and by means of the passing track and a series of switching movements two cars were placed on the loading track. Conductor Deming, in charge of extra 748, was flagging at a high-way crossing located between the loading-track switch and the station, while this switching was being performed, and he said that after the two cars had been spotted on the loading track the engine was backed eastward on the main track to the east passing-track switch, headed through that switch, ran around its train and was coupled to the head end, while Engineman Osis and Sullivan remained at the east passing-track switch, one setting the derail and the other closing and locking the switch. Conductor Deming then went into the caboose and engaged in other duties without knowing that the loading-track switch was relined for the main track. Both of the brakemen admitted overlooking the loading-track switch and the train departed from Oakwood with that switch lined for the loading track.

Engineman Smith, of train No. 303, said his train approached Oakwood at the usual rate of speed and that as it is a flag stop he was looking ahead to see if there were any passengers waiting to board the train. For this reason he did not observe the open switch until his train was within two or three coach-lengths of it and at the same time he noted that the switch target indicated

that the switch was open. He did not see the switch lamp of the loading-track switch at any time prior to the accident, but afterwards he noticed that it looked as if it were burning very faintly.

Conductor Dates, of train No. 503, estimated the speed of his train at the time of the accident to have been about 35 miles an hour, and said he felt no application of the brakes prior to the derailment. He examined the loading-track switch after the accident and found the switch lamp burning and the switch lined for the loading track, with the switch lever securely in the socket.

The statements of three other employees of this railroad who were passengers on train No. 303 were to the effect that they felt the air brakes being applied just prior to the shock of the derailment and that immediately after the accident they made an inspection of the switch and found it open and the switch light burning.

Section Laborer Ferro said he had been attending to the switch lamps on this section for about eight years, that he cleaned and filled the lamp on the loading-track switch on the afternoon of the day of the accident, and that at that time it was in good condition.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by an open switch.

Rule 104 of the book of rules of this railroad provides in part as follows:

"104 * * * Conductors are responsible for the position of the switches used by them and their trainmen, except where switch tenders are stationed * * *".

Conductor Deming went inside the caboose and occupied himself with other duties, without knowing whether the switches used by his crew were properly closed. Drake-men Otis and Sullivan, who actually handled the switches, were experienced employees but for some reason they were unable to explain how they overlooked closing the switch involved in this accident.

Engineman Smith, of train No. 303, had not received a signal to stop at Oakwood to discharge passengers, but expected to stop to pick up passengers if any were in sight, and apparently his attention was engaged in looking ahead in the darkness to ascertain if passengers were

waiting on the station platform, resulting in his failure to see the indication of the switch lamp at any time prior to the accident, his first warning of danger was when he saw that the switch points were open and then observed that the switch target was also set against his train. It did not appear that any one made any observations after the accident for the purpose of ascertaining how far the indication of the switch lamp could be seen.

Had an adequate block-signal system been in use on this line this accident probably would not have occurred, an adequate automatic train stop or train control device would have prevented it.

All of the employees involved were experienced men, at the time of the accident the train crew of train No. 303 had been on duty 8 hours and 23 minutes and the engine crew 8 hours and 37 minutes, previous to which they had all been off duty 14 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. DORLAND,

Director.